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ABSTRACT

All first-year Ohio superintendents were surveyed regarding their board of education relationships. The administrators were sent a questionnaire asking about the boards' trust and confidence in them, the nature and extent of board/superintendent communications, and the superintendents' job satisfaction. Of 63 questionnaires mailed out, 58 (92.1 percent) were returned and used in the database. When the superintendents rated various board-superintendent relationships, the highest rating generally was trust. However, these same superintendents rated their own boards' trust in them much lower. Whereas they rated the boards' confidence in the superintendents' fiscal competence as more important than curriculum competence, they felt their own boards had more confidence in their curriculum abilities than in finance. Also, the boards' confidence was significantly related to the boards' and superintendents' attending state meetings and going to restaurants together. Superintendents communicated to the board through the board president, and boards relied on the president for this communication. The first-year superintendents surveyed seemed satisfied with their career choice and job security. Included are 12 tables. (Nine references) (Author/MLH)

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Boards of Education
Trust, Confidence, and Communications:
A Study of First Year Superintendents

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Presented at the Annual Meeting of the

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Running head: SCHOOL BOARDS AND FIRST YEAR SUPERINTENDENTS

Abstract

First year Ohio school superintendents were surveyed about their perceptions of their relationships with their boards of education. All of the 63 first year superintendents were sent a questionnaire asking them about the boards' trust and confidence in them, the nature and extent of the communications between the board and the superintendents, and the job satisfaction of the superintendents. When the superintendents rated various relationships between boards and superintendents, the highest rating between Ohio boards and superintendents generally was trust. On the other hand, these same superintendents rated their own boards' trust in them much lower. While they rated the boards' confidence in the superintendents' fiscal competence more important than curriculum, they felt their own boards had more confidence in their curriculum abilities than in finance. Also, the boards' confidence in superintendents was significantly related to the boards and superintendents attending state meetings and going to restaurants together. Superintendents communicated with their boards through the board president, and boards relied on the president for this communication. Finally, these first year superintendents seemed satisfied with their career choice and job security.

Boards of Education

Trust, Confidence, and Communications:

A Study of First Year Superintendents

Introduction

The relationship between the board of education of a public school system and the school superintendent is extremely important to the functioning and progress of the system. The board and the superintendent must find ways to communicate with each other and develop mutual trust and confidence.

The University of Akron, with the cooperation of the Buckeye Association of School Administrators (the Ohio association for superintendents), conducted a study of all first year Ohio superintendents to examine their perceptions of their boards' confidence in them, the means of communication between them, and the job satisfaction after this first year as superintendent.

In a recent article on the dynamics of the superintendent-board relationship, Tallerico (1989) states that little is known about the relationship between school boards and superintendents. Yet, most writers of educational administration would agree about the "...importance of effective superintendent-school board relationships" (Knezevich, 1984, p. 294). Dykes (1965)

states, "A community's educational program is in jeopardy if its board and superintendent are not working together in such a manner as to provide proper leadership for the schools" (p. 103).

One of the areas studied is communications. The American Association of School Administrators (1980) stresses the importance of establishing a good system of communications between boards and superintendents. Freund (1988) also mentions the importance of communications, especially between the superintendent and the board president, while Wright (1983) emphasizes that the communications must go both ways.

Another area investigated was the trust and confidence of the board in the superintendent. Dykes (1965) states, "What the board does and what it permits the superintendent to do are influenced greatly by the confidence and trust existing between them" (p. 116-117). One aspect examined was the confidence of the board in the superintendent's abilities in the areas of finance, personnel, and curriculum. Awender (1985) mentions that finance and personnel are often dominated by senior members of the board, a circumstance which can affect the board-superintendent relationship.

Purpose of the Study

This study was the beginning of a longitudinal study of Ohio superintendents. This first year's data give important insights into aspects of the first year Ohio superintendent-board relationship which this researcher thinks is crucial to both boards and superintendents. This first year relationship, like first impressions, can affect future relationships between the superintendent and board members, and may, in fact, be a good predictor of those future relationsips. Because of this, this study will examine how boards and superintendents communicate during the first year and the extent that trust and confidence are present in the relationship.

The purpose of the study was to examine the perceptions of all first year school superintendents in Ohio with respect to their relationships with their boards of education. Specifically, this study examined the relationship of the boards' trust and confidence in the superintendents, the nature and extent of the communications between the superintendents and board members, the job satisfaction of the superintendents, along with some demographic data on the superintendents and their districts.

Research Questions

Below are the research questions investigated:

1. What aspects of the relationships between Ohio boards of education and superintendents do the superintendents perceive as the most important?

2. How do the perceptions in (1) compare to the perceptions of the superintendents with respect to their own boards?

3. What form of communications do superintendents and boards use? To what extent are they used?

4. To what extent do boards and superintendents review board policies?

5. Are these superintendents happy with their jobs?

6. What social and professional activities do the superintendents and boards members pursue together?

7. Is there any relationship between the superintendents' perceptions of the boards' trust and confidence in the superintendents and the activities which they pursue together?

8. Is there any relationship between the superintendents' perceptions of the boards' trust and

confidence in the superintendents and the methods of communication between them?

9. What is the job path to the superintendency?

10. Is there any relationship between the size of the school district and the age of the superintendents?

11. Is there any relationship between the size of the school district and the superintendents' perception of the boards' trust and confidence in the superintendents.

Method

The Buckeye Association of School Administrators (BASA: the Ohio state organization for superintendents) supplied a list of all first year Ohio superintendents. There were 63.

A questionnaire was sent to all 63 superintendents, asking them questions about their relationships with their boards of education, their activities, their means of communication, and questions for demographic purposes. A stamped, self-addressed return envelope was included with the questionnaire and cover letter from the BASA Executive Director. Phone calls were made to the districts which did not respond.

Of the 63 questionnaires which were mailed, 58 (92.1%) were returned and used in the data base.

The questionnaire itself was a collaborative effort among the Executive Director of BASA, the Coordinator of the Office of Educational Research and Evaluation at the University of Akron, and the researchers.

The data collection took place in June, 1989, upon the completion of the superintendents' first year as Ohio superintendents. The data analysis occurred during the 1989-90 academic year. The data were analyzed on the computer at the University of Akron, using SPSSx and SAS statistical packages. Specifically, the data were subjected to frequency analysis, Pearson correlations, and a program for test scale anaylsis which was used to estimate scale reliability. A .05 level of confidence was selected to test for statistical significance.

Results and Discussion

This study was designed to examine the perceptions of all first year Ohio superintendents with respect to their relationships with their boards of education.

Trust and Confidence

Table 1 shows what percentage of superintendents rated each item as "extremely important." Five of the six items received 70% or more rating: (See Table 1.)

	Boards 9
The board's trust in the superintendent	94.8%
The board's perception of the superintendent as being competent	89.7%
The board's confidence in the superintendent's handling of personnel matters	82.8%
The board's respect for the superintendent	79.3%
The board's confidence in the superintendent's handling of fiscal matters	74.1%

The lowest rating was the board's confidence in the superintendent's handling of curriculum matters at 50 %.

The three areas mentioned in order of rating percentages are: personnel, fiscal, and then curriculum.

Insert Table 1 about here

The superintendents were then asked to examine the situation in their own districts and tell to what extent their own boards demonstrated trust and confidence in them.

While the superintendents rated "trust" as the most important for Ohio superintendents, they rated their own boards trust in them as fifth, with 51.7%. Also, while

fiscal matters were judged more important than curriculum, their own boards demonstrated more confidence in their superintendents' abilities in curriculum than in finance (as perceived by the superintendents). (See Table 2.)

Insert Table 2 about here

One implication is that superintendents may look at Ohio boards in general and then look at their boards and declare, "My board is different. It has different opinions than other boards." Table 3 seems to bear this out. When Scale 1 (Ohio boards) is compared with Scale 3 (My board), it is found that there is no significant relationship between the superintendents' perception of the importance of Ohio boards' trust and confidence in Ohio superintendents and the superintendents' perceptions of his/her board's trust and confidence in him/her. This might be called the "grass is greener" effect: "Ohio boards feel this way, but my board feels differently." This translates into "I have special problems with my board."

Insert Table 3 about here

Communications

Table 4 shows the extent to which the responding superintendents and board members communicated and how they communicated, as perceived by the superintendents. (See Table 4.)

Some conclusions can be drawn from the data:

---Superintendents phone their board presidents slightly more often than the presidents phone the superintendents.

---Superintendents phone the board president about four times as often as they phone the other board members.

---Communications between board members and superintendents occur more often by phone than in the superintendents' offices.

---Over 70 % of the superintendents send non-board meeting materials to board members at least weekly.

---Relatively few superintendents take board members to lunch or visit their homes or businesses.

Insert Table 4 about here

The data seem to suggest that superintendents communicate with the board through the board president by phone. Likewise, the board president seems to recognize his/her leadership role on the board by initiating calls to the superintendent much more often than individual board members. There seems to be the implication that boards are relying on the board president to either (1) represent them when speaking to the superintendents or (2) be responsible for communicating the superintendent's messages to the individual board members themselves. (See Table 5.)

In looking at the possible relationships between variables, Table 5 shows a significant negative relationship between Scale 3 (My board's confidence in me) and the extent that the superintendents phone their board members. In other words, the more that superintendents perceive that the boards have confidence in them, the less these superintendents phone their board members. Or, to look at it in another way, superintendents who feel their boards do not have confidence in them tend to phone them more often.

This may mean that superintendents who fear they do not have the board's confidence may tend to call more often to try to communicate what they are doing and try to get the individual board member's opinion in an effort to gain the confidence of that board member.

Insert Table 5 about here

Board Policy Review

Since establishing board policy is one of the major functions of a board of education, the superintendents were asked whether the boards and the superintendents together routinely reviewed the individual policies in the board policy manual. Well over half of the superintendents, 62.1 %, reported that they did review policies with their boards on a regular basis. However, only 17.2 % of the districts had a permanent place on the board agenda for "Board Policy" similar to that found on the agenda for "Finance" or "Personnel." (See Table 6.)

These statistics seem to demonstrate that while there is no regular place on the board agenda for "policy," boards and superintendents do review board policy when they feel it is appropriate.

Insert Table 6 about here

Job Satisfaction

The superintendents were asked if they were happy with their career choice of being a superintendent. Half of the superintendents said they were very much satisfied; another 41.4 % responded that they were "Mostly" satisfied. A question somewhat related to this, and certainly related to board-superintendent relations, was the following: Do you look forward to school board meetings? Nearly three-quarters (74.1%) indicated that they did look forward to these meetings. (Remember that these are first year superintendents. Experienced superintendents may have a different opinion.) (See Table 7.)

Are these superintendents worrying about job security? Only 3.4 % worry a lot, with 44.8% not worrying at all. Again, first year superintendents probably have a multi-year contract and feel relatively "safe" at this time in their tenure. It will be interesting to see if there are changes in the responses to this question in the future.

Scale 3 (My board's confidence in me) correlated significantly with the question on worrying and career choice. (See Table 5.) When superintendents perceive that their boards have confidence in the jobs they are doing,

they tend to worry less about losing their jobs and tend to be happy with their career choice as a superintendent.

Insert Table 7 about here

Board-Superintendent Activities

There has been a debate on whether superintendents should attend social functions with board members. As a result, the superintendents polled were asked whether they were involved with board members in various social activities. Also, they were asked the same question about some professional and school activities during the past year. (See Table 8.)

From the results in Table 8, it is clear that superintendents and board members go to restaurants together (94.8 %) and attend state professional meetings together (93.1 %). Over three-quarters of those responding (79.3 %) had attended school functions together, like athletic events, plays, and concerts. Less than half had met socially after a board meeting, away from school, or had gone to a bar/lounge together. Only 12.1 % had gone to a national professional meeting together. The low score on this last activity, as compared with such a high score on

"state" meetings, could be accounted for by several factors: national meetings are usually annual events while there are usually several state meetings in a year; attending a national meeting requires expenditures far exceeding those needed for a state meeting, subjecting board members to possible criticism; and, the superintendent may choose to attend one national meeting (superintendents' conference---AASA) while the board members choose to attend another national meeting (school board association conference---NSBA).

In examing the relationship among variables, it was discovered that Scale 1 (Importance of board confidence in Ohio superintendents) was related significantly to the following, as described in Table 3:

---attending a state meeting together

---attending a restaurant together

---board members themselves going to professional meetings

There was no significant relationship between Scale 1 and each of the following:

---attending a national meeting together

---going to a bar/lounge together

---attending school activities

---meeting socially after a board meeting

On the other hand, Table 5 shows that Scale 3 (My board's confidence in me) is not significantly related to any of the six activities listed for superintendent and boards to do together.

Again, this may be an example of the "Grass is Greener" effect. The superintendents perceive that attending some functions together (restaurants and state meetings) is connected to board confidence in other superintendents while their own boards' confidence in them has no connection to any of these activities.

Insert Table 8 about here

Job Path

Along with certain demographic information, it was desired to learn how superintendents arrived at their present position. In other words, what position did they hold immediately prior to becoming a superintendent for the first time?

As Table 9 shows, over 55 % of the superintendents were either assistant/associate superintendents or high school principals just prior to their appointment as superintendent. This is consistent with other research in

this area and shows that the prior experience of this group of superintendents was similar to that of other superintendents polled in other research.

Insert Table 9 about here

District Size

There were only two statistically interesting relationships involving the size of the district (number of students). Table 10 displays the following: There was a significant relationship between the size of the district and the age of the superintendents. Large districts tended to have older superintendents. So, district school boards in larger districts were looking for more mature and experienced people as superintendents, even though it was a first Ohio superintendency for them all. (See Table 10.)

There was no significant relationship between the size of the district and Scale 3 (My board's confidence in me). Thus, smaller districts in more intimate rural settings did not have any more confidence in their superintendents, as perceived by the superintendents, than did larger districts.

Insert Table 10 about here

Table 11 shows the survey scale analysis of the various scales used in this study.

Insert Table 11 about here

Future studies of the same individuals over time will show any changes in behavior and will examine who is rehired and who is not. Thus, the data presented in this first study constitute baseline data for the longitudinal study.

Implications and Suggestions

Our data suggest that superintendents seem to find their own board's perceptions of them different from those of Ohio boards in general. This "grass is greener" effect makes them feel that their own boards are different from other boards. Superintendents need to discuss the superintendent-board relationship with other superintendents, read literature about it, and hear presentations from professional organizations about this

topic so that they realize that their own boards probably are not very different from other boards. And, if superintendents begin to feel that their boards are similar to other boards, superintendents can utilize the literature and research which exist to help them establish good relationships with their own boards, instead of insisting that "My board is different."

Superintendents should work with their board presidents to improve the communication with their boards. They need to make sure that the presidents are properly trained so that the presidents know their roles in communicating with the board members. Communication should occur on the phone and through frequent mailings to members as opposed to having lunch with board members or visiting their homes.

Superintendents should put "board policy" on the board agenda to keep this item in front of the board, emphasizing the board's role.

Finally, people aspiring to be school superintendents should seek positions as high school principals or assistant superintendents as steps to their ultimate career goal.

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Table 1

Relationships Between Boards and Superintendents Described As "Extremely Important" By Superintendents

Relationships	Percent	Mean	Std. Dev.
The board's trust in the superintendent	94.8	4.95	2.23
The board's perception of the superintendent as being competent	89.7	4.90	3.07
The board's confidence in the superintendent's handling of personnel matters	82.8	4.83	3.81
The board's respect for the superintendent	79.3	4.79	4.09
The board's confidence in the superintendent's handling of fiscal matters	74.1	4.76	4.32
The board's confidence in the superintendent's handling of			

(table continues)

	Boards		
	23		
	Percent	Mean	Std. Dev.
curriculum matters	50.0	4.45	5.97

Note. The percent indicates those marking "5" ("Extremely Important") on a 1-5 scale.

Table 2

Relationships Between a Superintendent and His/Her Board As Described As "Demonstrated All the Time" By Superintendents

Relationships	Percent	Mean	Std. Dev.
The board's respect for me	67.2	4.66	5.15
The board's perception of me as being competent	56.9	4.55	5.35
The board's confidence in me in personnel matters	55.2	4.50	6.00
The board's confidence in me in curriculum matters	53.4	4.50	5.70
The board's trust in me	51.7	4.52	6.82
The board's confidence in me in fiscal matters	41.4	4.36	5.83

Note. The percent indicates those marking "5" ("Demonstrates All the Time") on a 1-5 scale

Table 3

Correlation of Items With Scale 1 (The Superintendents' Perception Of the Importance of the Boards' Trust and Confidence in Ohio Superintendents)

Items	Pearson r	Probability	Sig.
Correlation Between Scale 1 And:			
Scale 3 (The superintendents' perceptions of his/her board's trust and confidence in him/her)	0.17946	0.1777	NS
The board and the superintendent attending a state meeting together	0.47366	0.0002	S
The board and the superintendent going to a restaurant together	0.42865	0.0008	S
The board and the superintendent going to a national meeting together	0.14736	0.2696	NS
The board and the superintendent			

(table continues)

	Boards 26		
	Pearson r	Probability	Sig.
going to a bar/lounge together	0.14396	0.2810	NS
The board and the superintendent attending school activities together	-0.03348	0.8030	NS
The board and the superintendent meeting socially after a board meeting away from school	0.06701	0.6172	NS
Board members attending professional meetings	0.48199	0.0001	S

Note. Scales 1 and 3 required a ranking of 1-5. For other questions, a "Yes" response was rated as "1"; a "No" response as "0."

Table 4

The Extent To Which Superintendents and Their Boards Communicate "Almost Daily" Or "Several Times A Week," As Described By Superintendents

Forms of Communications	Percent	Mean	Std. Dev.
I phone the board president	20.7(65.5)	2.95	9.07
The board president phones me	17.2(60.3)	2.81	8.05
I send the board written information besides board meeting information	13.8(72.4)	2.91	7.56
Board members phone me	6.9(36.2)	2.45	6.80
I phone board members	5.2(34.5)	2.40	5.91
Board members come to my office	3.4(15.5)	2.16	5.23
I take board members to lunch	1.7(12.0)	1.66	7.39
I go to board members' homes or businesses	1.7 (6.9)	1.84	5.86

(table continues)

Note. The first percent indicates those marking "5" ("Almost Daily") or "4" ("Several Times a Week") on a 1-5 scale; the percent in parentheses indicates those marking "5", "4", or "3" ("Almost Weekly") on the 1-5 scale

Table 5

Correlation of Items With Scale 3 (The Extent To Which My Board Has Confidence In Me)

Items	Pearson r	Probability	Sig.
Correlation Between Scale 3 and:			
The superintendent phoning board members	-0.26150	0.0474	S
Not worrying about losing job as superintendent	0.33930	0.0092	S
The extent of unhappiness in career choice as supt.	-0.42324	0.0009	S
The board and the superintendent attending a state meeting together	0.11422	0.3933	NS
The board and the superintendent attending a national meeting together	0.22234	0.0934	NS
The board and the superintendent			

(table continues)

		Boards 30	
	Pearson r	Probability	Sig.
going to a restaurant together	0.03786	0.7778	NS
The board and the superintendent going to a bar/lounge together	0.25930	0.0490	NS
The board and the superintendent meeting socially after a board meeting away from school	0.14240	0.2863	NS
The board and the superintendent attending school activities together	-0.11454	0.3919	NS

Table 6

Board Policy

	Percent Yes	Percent No
The board and I, together, routinely review individual policies in the board policy manual	62.1	37.9
There is a permanent place on the board agenda for "Board Policy" similar to that reserved for "Finance" or "Personnel."	17.2	82.8

Note. A "Yes" response was rated as "1"; a "No" as "0."

Table 7

Job Satisfaction

I am happy with my career choice of being a superintendent	50.0 % Very Much
	41.4 % Mostly, Yes
	8.6 % Many Times I am Not
	0.0 % Not at all
I look forward to school board meetings	74.1 % Yes
	24.1 % No
	(1.8 % No response)
Knowing that a lot of superintendents lose their jobs, I worry...	3.4 % A Lot
	50.0 % Some About It
	44.8 % Not at all
	(1.8 % No response)

Note. A "Yes" response was rated as "1"; a "No" as "0."

Table 8

Activities

Activities	Percent
The board and the superintendent pursued the following activities together this year:	
Went to a restaurant together	94.8
Attended a state meeting together	93.1
Attended school activities together	79.3
Met socially after a board meeting, away from school	48.3
Went to a bar/lounge together	39.7
Attended a national meeting together	12.1

Table 9

Job Path

	Percent
The position held immediately before becoming a superintendent for the first time:	
Asst. or Assoc. Superintendent	36.2
High School Principal	19.0
K-8 or Elementary Principal	10.3
"Principal" (level not stated)	6.9
Director of.....	5.2
Jr. High or Middle Sch. Principal	5.2
Executive Director	3.4

Note. All other categories named but not listed had only one response each. Thus, the total above is not 100.0 %.

Table 10

Correlation of Items With District Size

Items	Pearson r	Probability	Sig.
Correlation Between District Size and:			
The age of the superintendent	0.56063	0.0001	S
Scale 3 (The superintendents' perception of his/her boards' trust and confidence in him/her)	-0.11454	0.3919	NS

Note. Age was a continuous variable in the data.

Boards

36

Table 11

Survey Scale Analysis

Scale	Name	Survey Items	Mean	Std. Dev.	Cronbach's Alpha
1	The Importance of Board Confidence in Supts. in The State of Ohio	1-6	30.55	1.77	0.7357
2	The Extent of the Board Confidence in Supts. in The State of Ohio	7-12	24.79	4.20	0.9255
3	My Board's Confidence In Me	13-18	27.09	2.61	0.8408
4	The Activities of the Superintendent and Board Members	20,22, 23,24	3.17	2.86	0.7810
5	The Communications Between the Board And Me	25-32	19.17	3.04	0.6478

(table continues)

Note. The Survey Items column above lists the item numbers from the questionnaire.